

UA 205/00

Fear for

COLOMBIA Inhabitants of La Unión, La Esperanza and Arenas Altas villages of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community

Killed: Rigoberto GUZMAN, Elodino RIVERA, Diofanor CORREA, Humberto SEPULVEDA, Pedro ZAPATA, Jaime GUZMAN

Paramilitaries have reportedly given inhabitants of a "Peace Community" in north-western Colombia 20 days to leave, after publicly executing six of them in what appears to have been a joint army and paramilitary operation.

On 8 July some 20 hooded men went into La Union, one of the 17 villages that make up the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, in the department of Antioquia. They searched each house and rounded up the inhabitants in the middle of the village. The gunmen separated the men from the women and children, and shot the six men named above. They told the remaining villagers: "*tienen 20 días para desalojar toda la zona, porque esto lo vamos a acabar*" ("You have 20 days to leave the region, because we are not having any more of this"). The 63 families of La Union have begun to flee their homes.

An army helicopter apparently from the XVII Brigade hovered over the village throughout the attack. Five days earlier witnesses saw a convoy of at least 100 soldiers of the XVII Brigade marching up the mountains in the direction of San José de Apartadó and La Union. With the soldiers were at least two men in military uniforms without insignia. This is of concern in an area of strong paramilitary activity. The soldiers were from the *Batallón Bejaranos*, Bejaranos Battalion, and *Batallón Contra-Guerrilla Díaz López*, Díaz López Counter-Guerrilla Battalion. However, in spite of the witness accounts, the army has since denied that there were any soldiers in the area.

During the attack on La Union soldiers reportedly stopped a number of peasant farmers on the way to San José de Apartadó, and told two of them: "*vamos juntos y vamos a terminar con todo*" ("We are united and we are going to finish this off"). With the soldiers was a man in civilian clothes, believed to be a paramilitary.

On the day of the massacre the military units around La Unión reportedly told several people that there were guerrillas in the village. Two days earlier soldiers had told the inhabitants of another of the villages of the Peace Community that: "*la Comunidad de Paz es una comunidad de guerrilleros. Vamos a ingresar con los paramilitares*" ("The Peace Community is a community of guerrillas. We are going to go in with the paramilitaries").

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The mountainous terrain of San José de Apartadó is a natural stronghold for the armed opposition group *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. For this reason the security forces and their paramilitary allies have accused the inhabitants of being guerrillas or guerrilla sympathisers, and they have faced the constant threat of forced displacement and other human rights violations.

With the support of the Catholic Church and a number of Colombian non-governmental human rights organizations, 17 of the 32 communities which make up San José de Apartadó declared themselves a *Comunidad de Paz*, Peace Community, in March 1997. This was an attempt to persuade the warring factions

on both sides to respect their right to life and neutrality in the conflict, but they have continued to face intimidation, torture and death at the hands of FARC, the army and the paramilitaries.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:

- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the attack on the community of San José de Apartadó on 8 July 2000, in which six people were killed;
- expressing serious concern for the safety of the inhabitants of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community in Urabá, especially those in the villages of La Unión, La Esperanza and Arenas Altas, urging the authorities to take all measures deemed appropriate by the communities themselves to guarantee their safety;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the XVII Brigade and paramilitary groups in the departments of Antioquia and Chocó, for the results to be made public and for those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate and decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with repeated government commitments and UN recommendations.

Please also urge your own government to publicly condemn this attack and to monitor the efforts of the Colombian government to ensure that this attack is fully investigated, those responsible are brought to justice and action is taken to combat paramilitary groups in the region. In the past year delegations from a number of governments have expressed support for the Peace Communities of Antioquia and Chocó, and have travelled to these communities or met with their representatives.

APPEALS TO:

President of Colombia

Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana, Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: President Pastrana, Bogotá, Colombia

Telex: 44281 PALP CO

Fax: + 57 1 286 7434/284 2186/337 1351

Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Pastrana

Minister of Defence

Dr. Luis Fernando Ramírez Acuña
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional
Avenida Eldorado CAN - Carrera 52
Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia

Telegrams: Ministro de Defensa, Bogotá, Colombia

Telex: 42411 INPRE CO; 44561 CFAC CO

Fax: + 57 1 222 1874

Salutation: Sr. Ministro/Dear Minister

Commander of the Armed Forces

General Fernando Tapias Stahelin
Comandante de las Fuerzas Militares
Avenida El Dorado - Carrera 52
Santafé de Bogotá
Colombia

Telegrams: Comandante Fuerzas Militares, Bogota, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 222 2096

Salutation: Sr. Comandante/Dear Commander

Governor of the Department of Antioquia

Dr. Alberto Builes Ortega, Gobernador del Departamento de Antioquia
Gobernación de Antioquia, Calle 42B, # 52-106, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia

Telegrams: Gobernador de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia

Fax: + 574 381 1342

Salutation: Sr. Gobernador / Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace

Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz

AA 31861

Santafé de Bogotá

Colombia

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 21 August 2000.